

**OFFICE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH
NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN'S
HEALTH**

RURAL HEALTH

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office on Women's Health established the National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health (CoE) program in 1996. The contracts for these Centers were awarded competitively to leading academic health centers throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. The Centers are developing and implementing new models of care for women that unite the latest advances in women's health research, medical training, clinical care, public health education, community outreach, and the career advancement of women in the health sciences. The objective of the Centers is to establish standards of excellence for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and culturally competent approach to women's health that will improve the health status of all women across the life span.

DHHS Secretary Tommy Thompson has made improving rural health and social services a top departmental priority. In July 2001, he announced the DHHS Initiative on Rural Communities, a department-wide effort to improve the provision of health and human services to rural families and individuals. A Task Force was created to examine how DHHS programs could improve services to rural communities. This pamphlet highlights the programs and activities the CoEs have established that address rural health.

Clinical Services

◆ Indiana University

The Indiana University (IU) CoE spearheaded the preparation of an RO1 application in response to a National Institutes of Health (NIH) Request for Applications (RFA) on international interventions to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. The IU CoE proposal is targeted at decreasing vertical transmission of HIV in the rural areas surrounding Moi University Faculty of Health Sciences in Eldoret, Kenya, a medical school that Indiana University School of Medicine has been affiliated with since its creation 11 years ago.

◆ University of Puerto Rico

The University of Puerto Rico CoE is studying the possibility of expanding its clinical services to the rural areas around the town of Loiza. The CoE has begun negotiations with the Loiza Comprehensive Health Council to become a satellite clinic of the CoE. The “Concilio”, a primary community health care center that also serves as a practice site for University of Puerto Rico medical students, provides services to the town of Loiza. Loiza is a predominantly poor black community with high infant mortality rate and an increasing number of medically indigent immigrants located close to the San Juan Metropolitan Area.

◆ University of Washington

The University of Washington (UW) participates in a project whose goal is to partner with providers in underserved communities through the Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho (WWAMI) region on a Survey on Women's

Health Issues. WWAMI preceptors provide clinical training opportunities for student from a variety of disciplines. This group serves as an important source of information on the needs of rural and underserved populations in the region. UW CoE took advantage of this opportunity and the availability of non-OWH funds to query this group on the relative importance of women's health topics. This information will be used to plan for future outreach topics and evaluate whether the current patient education efforts of the CoE curriculum group are in line with the needs of the medical community.

The UW School of Medicine (SoM) has been a leader in medical education for many years. It has been ranked for seven consecutive years as the nation's top primary-care medical school in U.S. News & World Report's annual survey of graduate and professional schools. The magazine's researchers compare the nation's medical schools on several factors, including student selectivity; percentage of graduates entering primary care, faculty/student ratios and reputation. Reputation has been based on the results of a questionnaire sent to the country's medical school deans, senior faculty, and residency program directors. Along with rating medical schools generally, the survey measured reputations in teaching specific medical disciplines. The University of Washington SoM ranked first in family medicine, first in rural medicine, fourth in women's health care and rural medicine, and sixth in geriatrics. The Dean of the UW SoM cites community support as being the primary reason for this outstanding performance. The UW SoM medical students benefit from the teaching of the health professionals in towns across the five-state region of Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho. The UW SoM partner universities in these states teach the first-year medical classes and obtain community training opportunities

for our medical students. These efforts have been essential to the success of the regional medical education program.

Rural communities in the Northwest have suffered increasingly severe limitations in access to care as more care providers are forced to restrict Medicare and Medicaid assignments. Safety net providers such as the community health clinics and the UW Academic Medical Center have assumed greater burdens as these increasing demands are placed on the system.

◆ University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin CoE has several affiliated clinics in rural areas of the State. This affiliation is not administrative or contractual, but rather a mechanism to facilitate communication regarding updates in clinical issues in women's health and women's health program development as well as to support leadership development of women physicians in rural areas. The University of Wisconsin CoE has four women physicians who work in different rural areas of the State on the CoE Advisory Committee. As such, they receive e-mail updates and attend the annual Advisory Committee meeting.

Professional Education

◆ University of Illinois at Chicago

The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) College of Nursing has a strong education program for Women's Health Nurse Practitioners and Nurse-Midwives in the underserved rural areas of Illinois through distance learning and regional programs (Peoria is the base). There are six southern counties without obstetrical

providers. The UIC educated practitioners in these counties. The UIC also serve the Northern Indiana area and has educated the same professionals in this area.

◆ University of Puerto Rico

The University of Puerto Rico, School of Medicine has a number of practice centers in community-based facilities and satellite clinics, which are located in rural and urban centers, for the primary care clinical experiences of its students. During their rotations, students and residents have the opportunity to experience health care delivery for women. Faculty coordinators of these experiences are members of the CoE Clinical Advisory Committee.

The CoE has established a relationship with the Concilio de Salud Integral de Loíza (Loíza Comprehensive Health Council), a primary care delivery system that has provided services to the communities, both rural and urban, in the town of Loíza since 1972. The Council is a preceptor site for medical students. It has a Women's Health Section with which the CoE is currently developing an agreement to designate it as a CoE satellite clinic.

Agreements are also under way between the CoE and Carolina Area Hospital, a secondary and tertiary care hospital serving an urban/rural area of over 250,000 inhabitants, comprising the towns of Carolina, Canóvanas, Loíza, and Trujillo Alto.

◆ University of California at San Francisco

A nurse-midwifery specialization is offered in a course of study accredited by the American College of Nurse-Midwives. The student may enter through one of two options: Urban and Rural.

Nurse midwives are involved in the care of CoE patients.

- Rural Option: This option is designed to prepare registered nurses who live in Central California to deliver care to the underserved populations residing in the San Joaquin Valley. The program of study parallels the urban option; however, classroom instruction occurs at both San Francisco and Fresno. The clinical component of the program takes place in the San Joaquin Valley. Components of this option are offered in conjunction with other educational institutions. At the end of the program, graduates receive a certificate as a Women's Health Nurse Practitioner/Nurse-Midwife from the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) School of Medicine and a Master of Science degree from the UCSF School of Nursing. Additionally, the student will be eligible to sit for the American College of Nurse-Midwives certification exam.
- Urban Option: The student spends the first year of graduate study learning about theory and research, primary care, and basic didactic and clinical skills in nurse-midwifery. These experiences occur primarily in the culturally diverse San Francisco Bay Area at the San Francisco General Hospital Midwifery Service. In the second year, the student selects from a wide variety of courses in health policy, ethics, management, and women's health, in addition to completion of required core courses. An advanced clinical residency occurs during the second year of graduate study, generally at a geographically different location. Previous experience in labor and delivery nursing or other women's health care settings is recommended; an admission interview is required. Due to the intensive clinical requirements, fluency in spoken English is mandatory for acceptance into the program, and fluency in Spanish is strongly recommended.

◆ University of Washington

In the late 1960s, federal manpower studies predicted shortages of physicians, so the U.S. government earmarked funding for states to build new medical schools. As a result of the federal dollars, more than 30 new medical schools were created in a relatively brief period of time. The UW SoM was already one of the nation's top five research and educational institutions, but had not yet played a role within the region. In 1968, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho, and even the eastern side of Washington State, considered building their own medical schools. Wyoming came within one vote of creating its own medical school. These states, with economies largely dependent on mineral extraction, forestry, agriculture, and fishing, were each justifiably cautious about making the large capital and labor investments required to establish an independent, quality training facility for physicians. Partnering with the UW SoM provided a welcome alternative. Alaska, Montana, and Idaho chose to partner with the UW SoM and this regional education program became known as WAMI in 1971. It became WWAMI in 1996 when the Governor of Wyoming signed into law a statute authorizing Wyoming to join this medical education partnership. These partnerships have grown over time to include allied health training, residency education and assistance to rural hospitals in this region.

Between the first and second year, the UW SoM's dual missions of research and primary care are juxtaposed. Students may elect to do a summer of funded research or elect to do a four- to six-week experience with a primary care physician serving a rural or underserved population. This program, known as the Rural/Underserved Opportunity Program (RUOP), has matched charismatic physicians with students over the five-state region. Many of the CoE providers serve as preceptors for students

participating in the program.

The UW CoE and the Bergan Fund are planning to distribute a CD of cases from the CoE and OsteoEd web sites to more than 100 RUOP preceptors in the WWAMI region. The UW is the sole medical school for the WWAMI states. These states encompass 27 percent of the land mass of the US and three percent of the population. Professional isolation and lack of opportunities for continuing medical education result in significant provider stress in these rural areas. Computer and web-based learning is a way of reaching providers in these remote areas.

The UW School of Nursing encourages its students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels to pursue opportunities to provide nursing care services to people both in the U.S. and abroad. Nursing faculty recognize that nurse professionals actively participate as members of inter-disciplinary teams in clinics, hospitals, and community settings. In addition, nurse practitioners fill critical health care needs in both urban and rural settings for portions of the population that does not receive adequate health care. Nurses are significant providers of care to women participating in the CoE program.

The UW health science students and trainees benefit from a teaching consortium that involves essentially every major medical institution in Seattle and extends to over 45 sites across the WWAMI region. Experiences in the WWAMI training sites have been shown to encourage students to appreciate the benefits of caring for rural and underserved populations.

The UW CoE has entered into discussions with the American Heart Association to determine how cardiovascular disease education can be included in the Rural Outreach Student Educator

(ROSE) project. Currently student-educators are teaching rural residents about osteoporosis.

Research

◆ University of Pennsylvania

The emphasis of the University of Pennsylvania (U Penn) CoE international efforts is India and Latin America. During this fiscal year the U Penn CoE hosted a visit from representatives of ICICI, one of the largest banks in India, to discuss opportunities for programs to improve women's health in urban slums and rural areas. An action plan was developed focusing on nutrition and health education. Pilot interventions are being planned with colleagues at the University of Pune.

◆ Tulane and Xavier Universities of Louisiana

The Bogalusa Heart Study is a NIH-funded 27-year descriptive investigation into the early natural history of cardiovascular risk factors in a biracial (black/white) community. Detailed protocols, rigorously trained staff, and quality control methods are hallmarks of this study. A publication list includes three books, numerous monographs, and more than 500 journal articles. Bogalusa is typical of semi-rural southern communities and CV risk factor data have been generally comparable to national data. An extensive database and tracking registry have been maintained. Some of the women served by the CoE participate in this study.

The Tulane/Xavier CoE recently submitted a proposal for a "Louisiana Comprehensive Women's Health Care Initiative." Louisiana relies heavily on its regional, State-supported hospital

system and large network of federal and state funded public health clinics to directly provide preventive and primary health care for its large medically indigent population. Despite these efforts, there is still a critical need to create an infrastructure that assures comprehensive, continuous, community-based, quality care for all low-income women, including adolescents, those of child-bearing age, and beyond. In response to the poor health status of Louisiana women, combined with a fragmented health delivery system, the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) and the Tulane/Xavier National Center of Excellence in Women's Health are proposing to develop a model for comprehensive women's health care in public health care clinics in Louisiana. Since Louisiana is a predominantly rural state with large areas of health care shortages, such an initiative is all the more important. A proposal has been submitted to the Health Resources and Services Administration requesting support for this initiative.

◆ University of Washington

The UW CoE and the Center for Women's Health Research were instrumental in the dissemination of research through a number of educational seminars given in rural and underserved communities in rural Washington. Qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the community health clinic interviews and surveys revealed that support was often lacking for evaluation and program assessment to justify grant funding.

◆ University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin is a site for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) sponsored Women's Health Initiative and the principal investigator of this clinical trial is the Research Director of the CoE. Since Wisconsin is primarily a rural state, a focus of their

award is the recruitment of rural women into this trial. One of the CoE faculty, a previous recipient of the Junior Faculty Minority Outreach contract, continues to study behavioral strategies to reduce health risk behaviors in Native American teens in rural Wisconsin.

The CoE Center Director is collaborating with investigators on the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS). This, largely rural cohort, has been studied since 1957. Funded by a new NIH R01 and Program Project grants, WLS is entering a new round of surveys and the CoE Center Director is taking the lead on developing questions related to childhood abuse and maltreatment to examine how these early life experiences impact on mental and physical health outcomes decades later. In addition to prospective data on a number of family background variables and educational attainment, WLS will enable gender comparisons.

One of the Women's Health Fellows based at the CoE worked with the Beaver Dam Cohort Study to investigate the relationship between cognition and estrogen replacement therapy. Beaver Dam is a town in rural Wisconsin and most of the town is involved in this longitudinal cohort study.

Leadership

◆ Magee-Womens Hospital

Members of the Magee CoE participated as mentors for "Women's Health Mission to Kazakhstan: A Workshop in Personal, Organizational, and Community Leadership. Working with Magee Womancare International the mentors trained Kazakh women's health leaders to strengthen their ability to influence and manage healthcare reform initiatives in their own country, as well

as to establish a regional network of women's health professionals. Kazakhstan is the largest of the independent republics of the former Soviet Union. Most of the country is sparsely populated which makes rural health care and medical education to improve the population's reproductive health very difficult. It is a priority to improve the medical qualifications of the nation's medical professionals whom the vast majority are women.

◆ University of Puerto Rico

The Center of Excellence in Women's Health of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) Medical Sciences Campus has partnered with the Hispanic Center of Excellence (HCoE) of the UPR School of Medicine for the development of its Leadership Plan. HCoE is a major contributor to the understanding of health issues affecting Hispanics, the development of instructional activities for health professionals serving this population, and the training of Hispanic physicians sensitive to cultural differences. It works towards increasing the opportunities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those from rural areas, to compete successfully in medicine and health-related careers. The CoE works with the HCoE on a Faculty Career Development & Leadership component that includes training and mentoring in academic management, teaching, and research skills. While the program is not directed exclusively to female faculty, most participants are in fact female.

◆ University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin CoE collaborates with the State Medical Society (SMS) in leadership development efforts targeting women physicians around the State, which includes many rural

areas. The SMS is having its Third Annual Women's Health Summit for Women Physicians this year and professional development is always a large part of the program.

Four women physicians from rural areas are on the CoE Advisory Committee, which offers opportunity for networking, decreasing professional isolation, and leadership development.

Outreach

◆ Indiana University

The CoE participates in an annual women's health conference in Batesville, Indiana, that is targeted towards women in this rural community. The CoE provides speakers on a variety of topics.

As part of a new contract that the IU CoE has with the OWH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the IU CoE will provide educational outreach about diethylstilbestrol (DES) to health care providers throughout the Midwest, including a number of rural communities in Indiana.

The Director of the Purdue Cooperative Extension Services, A CoE affiliate, will be a speaker at the rural health session at the 2003 CoE Forum.

IU CoE has begun working with the Purdue Cooperative Extension Services to provide information on women's health to their clients, which gives us access to all 92 counties in Indiana, many of them rural. IU plans to involve them in tobacco education and cessation efforts, breast health, and ultimately mammography through a mobile van.

◆ Magee-Womens Hospital

The Magee CoE acts as an education and outreach consultant to several hospitals serving rural areas within the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Health System. The hospitals are Lee Hospital in Johnson and Horizon Health System in Hermitage, Pennsylvania. Programs that the CoE were consulted on and taught include: domestic violence education for professionals, a women's health education series, the heart check program, osteoporosis education series, and training of childbirth educators (Lamaze certified childbirth educators).

◆ MCP Hahnemann University (doing business as Drexel University)

MCP Hahnemann, doing business as Drexel University, has submitted a proposal to work with the Northeastern Vermont Area Health Education Center (AHEC), a National Community Center of Excellence in Women's Health, on "Outreach and Education on Domestic Violence in Rural Settings." The project will focus on two identified needs for the Vermont rural community: Increase awareness and knowledge among women and girls of domestic violence and how to address the problem; and identify strategies and methods to ensure that high school teenagers have accurate and helpful information on domestic violence as well as support within their school environments. Drexel University CoE will develop and implement a preventive program for women and girls designed to raise awareness about domestic violence, recognize abusive situations and avoid becoming a victim. The program will first be conducted in the Philadelphia region, with Vermont staff attending, and then the Drexel CoE will work with Vermont to adapt the program for their rural audiences. A "Conversations" model will be used for the programs. The Drexel CoE will also provide consultation to the

Northeastern Vermont AHEC on developing a needs assessment and integration strategies for putting programs and services in place in local high schools. Drexel will also assist with identifying opportunities to further efforts within the Vermont regional and statewide domestic violence programs.

◆ University of Michigan

The Women's Health Resource Center ("The Center") is especially designed to meet the unique needs of women. The "hub" of the Women's Health Program CoE, the Center serves as the coordination point for all services. The Center provides personal assistance with health care decision-making and information seeking on a walk-in, telephone, and Internet basis. It houses a health education library with up-to-date books, journal, videotapes, Internet search browsers, CD-ROMs, and a women's health information database, all available to the public, free of charge. Dedicated and specially trained volunteers, including women with nursing and social work backgrounds, staff the center in addition to a full-time administrative assistant.

The Resource Center is also an access point for women who wish to be seen in any of the CoE-affiliated clinics. With over 30 satellite health clinics providing primary and specialty care services in rural and suburban communities throughout Southeast Michigan, the Women's Health Program CoE reaches many different populations and geographic locations. In addition to providing clinical services and health education in these community-based locations, each will be a focus for research subject recruitment efforts.

◆ University of Puerto Rico

The CoE sponsored Educational Program “MujerEs” is a comprehensive education program for both consumers and health professionals funded by a pharmaceutical company. The main component of the program consists of a Conference Hall on Wheels that visits towns and rural areas throughout the Island offering conferences on women’s health, videos, and densitometry tests free of charge. The Conference Hall on Wheels exhibits a video on menopause, produced by our Menopause Information Center with CoE collaboration. In addition, conferences on one or more of the following topics are offered to participants: Breast Cancer, Breast Self-Examination, Menopause, Osteoporosis, Nutrition, and Taking Control of Our Lives. The program also includes two continued education symposia, one for physicians and another for consumers, a radio program for consumers at the local radio station “Super Cadena”, and a TV program. The radio and TV programs targeted both rural and urban audiences. The TV program was hosted once a month for a year during the morning show “Tu Mañana” and covered a host of topics concerning Breast Cancer, including its prevention, epidemiology, and diagnosis. This very successful program reached more than 300,000 women living in urban and rural areas in the last two years.

The CoE participated in two proposals that were submitted to the UPR Central Administration to strengthen women’s health information in Vieques, a rural area. The first project was geared toward strengthening the Vieques Public Library: a collection development plan, strengthening of the telecommunication infrastructure, development of an information component in women’s health, and promotion and dissemination of activities for the project. Secondly, the activity proposes the organization of a center to coordinate women’s health related activities, provide

information for Vieques women and their families, both at the individual level and through group activities, and to develop activities at Vieques Schools. The Vieques Women’s Health Information Center offers information and educational activities to empower Vieques women on health prevention and promotion and early diagnosis of diseases such as breast and cervical cancer. The center has prepared a plan that identifies the priorities and health strategies to be followed, based on the main health concerns of Vieques residents and on the results of the epidemiological surveillance’s of the rural community.

◆ University of Washington

As part of the Center for Women’s Health Research Dissemination Core, a series of six half-day women’s health workshops and health fairs are held in rural underserved communities in Washington State. The lay public, nurse practitioners, and physicians attend the events.

◆ University of Wisconsin

The University of Wisconsin CoE partners with the Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation. The Foundation sponsors Rural Health Roundtables around the State to bring women’s health information to women in their communities.

The University of Wisconsin CoE partners with the Madison Veterans Hospital and the State Veterans Agency to present an annual Women Veterans Health Conference. This year approximately 100 women veterans attended, most from rural areas in Wisconsin.

**NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE
IN WOMEN'S HEALTH
May 2003**

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